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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8383rd meeting
Friday, 26 October 2018, 9 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Solíz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Beirut.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to address the Council from Beirut.

(*spoke in English*)

I take this opportunity to update you, Sir, and the members of the Security Council on developments with regard to Syria that have taken place since my last briefing (see S/PV.8373), which took place last week in New York. Today, I will focus in particular on an update on my consultations in Damascus two days ago.

Following the meeting between the Secretary-General and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Al-Moualem, on the margins of the General Assembly, I met Minister Al-Moualem in Damascus on 24 October. We focused on the political process and the efforts to convene a constitutional committee. I appreciated the quite frank nature of the exchanges that we had in Damascus. Minister Al-Moualem expressed appreciation for his meeting with the Secretary-General during the General Assembly. He indicated that it paved the way for the meeting in Damascus. I will now refer as accurately as possible to what I heard from Minister Al-Moualem.

He strongly underlined the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of United Nations Member States. He underlined that the Syrian Constitution is a highly sensitive matter of national sovereignty. On the Sochi final statement, Minister Al-Moualem referred to another outcome, rather than the one circulated by the Russian Federation to the Council. He said that it was possible for the Government of Syria to take some elements of the outcome circulated by Russia and "reconcile" them with the Government's preferred other outcome. The key differences in this regard concerned mainly the role of the United Nations.

With regard to the understanding reached between Russia and the United Nations before the Sochi event, which I mentioned specifically when I briefed the Council on 17 October, Minister Al-Moualem did not view it as consistent with the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Basically, Minister Al-Moualem did not accept a role for the United Nations in general in identifying or selecting the middle third list; rather, Minister Al-Moualem indicated that the Government of Syria and Russia had agreed recently that the three Astana guarantors and the Syrian Government would, in consultations among them, prepare a proposal with regard to the third middle list and present it to the United Nations facilitation. I should add, just for the sake of completeness, that Mr. Al-Moualem, did not on that occasion or in that meeting, indicate the Government's views on the mandate, chairmanship, decision-making or any other aspects of the rules of procedure necessary for a constitutional committee to function.

For my part, I welcomed the chance for the United Nations to talk directly with the Government about the constitutional committee. I also regretted that this had not been possible since the Sochi meeting and that the Government had declined the United Nations offers to engage it directly on the constitutional committee and its follow-up. I recalled that it was in this context of non-engagement by the Government with the United Nations that the United Nations began to work with the Astana guarantors, at their own suggestion, on a package and that Russia and Iran had informed the United Nations that they had been constantly consulting the Government as the consultations proceeded.

I indicated that it was also appropriate and logical for the United Nations, as the mediator mandated by the Security Council, to seek understandings with Russia regarding a meeting that Russia had proposed in Sochi, hosted and facilitated, in order to ensure a common understanding of how the initiative would contribute to the United Nations-mandated process. I reminded

Minister Al-Moualem of the convening role of the United Nations, mandated by resolution 2254 (2015). I also recalled the terms of the Sochi final statement, as circulated by the Russian Federation to the Council. I would also remind the members of the Security Council today of what was agreed. The first task was

> "to form a constitutional committee comprising the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation along with wide-represented opposition delegation for drafting of a constitutional reform as a contribution to the political settlement under the United Nations auspices in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015)".

Secondly, the

> "constitutional committee would at the very least comprise Government, opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks, Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women; ... care would be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components; and... final agreement is to be reached in the United Nations-led Geneva process on the mandate and terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for the composition of a constitutional committee."

I explained in detail during the last briefing the criteria that guide us in approaching the questions on the list, which I went through with Minister Al-Moualem. Most importantly, I stressed that the United Nations was in Damascus precisely to consult the Government on the list. As the facilitator, I offered for the United Nations to work there and then with the Government if the Government objected to particular names, or even on the development of a new, credible balanced and inclusive list as long as it had those characteristics. I observed that, to me, this seemed to fully respect the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic. Indeed, it was an invitation to exercise that sovereignty.

At a certain point, Minister Al-Moualem proposed that I withdraw the proposed middle third list already on the table. I indicated that the United Nations could withdraw its proposal only once and only if there was an agreement on a new, credible, balanced and inclusive list consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi final statement. I urged that we seize the opportunity to ascertain if that was possible or not. Minister Al-Moualem indicated that he would get back to me if new instructions came from his own leadership. However, he also said that he preferred, at that stage, to await the outcome of my forthcoming consultations with the Astana guarantors.

I should add that Minister Al-Moualem stated that the Astana guarantors had rejected the initial United Nations proposal on a third list. I, for my part, indicated that this was not really the case and that while they had suggested the need for some changes, they were engaging on the proposal and that it had already been revised more than once. I also indicated that all three guarantors supported the role of the United Nations, as per resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi declaration.

The Government has expressed its position clearly and I can say that it has indicated that it wishes that position to be made public, which I am currently doing. However, I cannot at this stage report any evolution on its position beyond what I have just said and what I have heard myself, which I am reporting to faithfully to the Council. The efforts of those who convened and sponsored Sochi to ensure that the Government of Syria would be fully on board with the outcomes of the Sochi final declaration have not, as of today, produced the outcome we were hoping for. Otherwise, we would have heard something different.

Taking into account, first, the mandate of the Special Envoy, embodied in resolution 2254 (2015); secondly, Minister Al-Moualem's different understanding of the role of the United Nations and of the Sochi final declaration; and thirdly, the extent of the Government's desire to reopen the work today, we have a serious challenge ahead. Let me be frank. It is my intention to spare no effort to address this challenge during the coming weeks. Since Minister Al-Moualem indicated that the Government's preferred methodology at this stage was to work with the Astana guarantors on a third list, a great deal of responsibility and expectation rests now on them and on how to implement the Sochi declaration in a manner that would carry forward the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and give practical effect to the basic points that the United Nations supported in Sochi.

As I have already indicated, the United Nations proposal was made after careful consultations, including with the guarantors, and has already been revised in the light of those consultations. The sheer difficulty of keeping everyone on board should be a reminder to all to be careful in thinking that some radically different approach has any prospect of success.

The United Nations is not opposed to constructive and moderate suggestions so long as we maintain the same spirit of credibility — I repeat, credibility — balance, and the international legitimacy of the middle third list on the table. There is a sense of urgency to find common ground or to at least clarify where we stand, because we should not miss the opportunity offered by the Idlib window. That is why November is becoming so important.

Let me also stress once more that the United Nations believes it is important to ensure a minimum of 30 per cent women representatives in the committee and that this requires at least 24 of the 50 representatives in the middle third to be women. Tomorrow, I will be travelling to Istanbul to brief the Presidents of France, Germany, Russia and Turkey when they meet to discuss Syria. I am honoured by this invitation and will use that occasion to remind those four important leaders that, given the fact that a catastrophe in Idlib has so far been avoided; that the international consensus to see a credible and balanced constitutional committee with United Nations facilitation as soon as possible; and that the instructions given to me by the Secretary-General — whom I am constantly consulting on the matter more than ever before — require me to exhaust every avenue in the time that remains to my mandate, there is, in my opinion, still a clear window of opportunity that needs to be urgently seized.

The influence that can be exercised by all world leaders, including in particular the four world leaders meeting tomorrow in Istanbul, can be crucial in ensuring that this happens. Seeing as members of the Small Group on Syria will meet on Monday in London, I will also use that occasion to host a meeting with them later on, within the context of the Geneva process. I really look forward to hosting the Astana guarantors very soon. They themselves met in recent days and, according to their statement, discussed many aspects of a constitutional committee. That meeting will be vitally important to consultations.

I will spare no effort in the time that remains to my mandate to verify whether it is indeed possible to convene a United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-owned, Syrian-led constitutional committee that is credible, balanced and inclusive and that contributes, in the context of the Geneva process, to implementing resolution 2254 (2015). If it is feasible, the United Nations will convene such a committee as soon as possible. I will, in any case, share a full assessment as Special Envoy when I brief the Council in person on 19 November. Meanwhile, we shall keep our door open, and we shall keep under review all options for a constructive and credible outcome.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Council, I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing.

The United States, along with all other members of the small group — Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom — and other like-minded Security Council partners are united in our position that the United Nations should move swiftly to convene the constitutional committee. We continue to strongly support Special Envoy De Mistura's efforts towards the formation of that committee in November.

As the Special Envoy noted, the constitutional committee must be credible, balanced and representative of the Syrian people, and we note, despite what the Special Envoy heard in Damascus, that the United Nations has exclusive control over the committee's membership, schedule and scope of work, as affirmed by the Russian Federation in its January 2018 Sochi declaration.

Further obstruction of the committee's formation is unacceptable. Further delay risks squandering the window of opportunity provided by the Turkish and Russian demilitarized zone, which succeeded in preventing further bloodshed in Idlib and beyond. The parties have been consulted. No one should doubt that the United Nations Special Envoy has the mandate to move forward to establish the constitutional committee. Any list in that respect, by whomever proposed, must have the approval of the Special Envoy, not just in its membership but in how it is compiled. That is his charge, and not just from Sochi, but from paragraph 2 of resolution 2254 (2015).

We should be in full agreement as to the fact that there is no alternative to a United Nations political process as described in that resolution and agreed by unanimous decision of the Council. That political process must move forward now.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank the Special Envoy of the

United Nations Secretary-General for his particularly important and enlightening briefing concerning progress in the political process and, more broadly, for his tireless efforts, which deserve and enjoy our full support.

We requested this meeting in response to the proposal made by Staffan De Mistura last week. We did so because Syria is currently at a crossroads: it could either tip into military escalation in Idlib, which would open up one of the darkest chapters in the Syrian tragedy, or it could take the difficult path of genuine political momentum for a settlement to the conflict. We are deeply convinced that today, perhaps for the first time in seven years, there is a narrow window of opportunity to achieve that. Both scenarios, the encouraging one and the bleak one, are possible today; the choice depends a great deal on us and on the ability of the Council to come together around the option of peace.

The establishment of the constitutional committee can and must be the turning point that we are looking for, a first step in a process of genuine political momentum. Such establishment as soon as possible is therefore our priority today. To be clear, given the choice between war and peace in Syria, the key lies largely in the land of Tolstoy; the establishment of the constitutional committee requires that Russia leverage its full weight in Damascus in this respect, just as we are doing for our part with our partners in the small group. After all, the idea of the constitutional committee came out of an initiative of Russian diplomacy, and today all the members of the Council, without exception, have advocated for its establishment.

So what are we waiting for to move forward? I should like today to make three points: to clearly identify the responsibilities of the Syrian regime, whose obstruction is continuing to block the launch of the political process; to share with the Council the efforts made by France and the small group to achieve this; and, lastly, to briefly lay out possible subsequent solutions.

Our friend Staffan went to Damascus to hear the expectations and positions of one of the parties to the conflict. From the picture that he has just painted, it seems, as was, unfortunately, predictable, that the regime does not consider itself bound by a commitment, even though a few months ago it transmitted its list to the Special Envoy, and that it is rejecting the list of the third third of the constitutional committee proposed by the Special Envoy, in so doing not hesitating to trample the rules laid down in Sochi.

The conclusions of his visit provide clarification concerning the responsibilities at play and require us to redouble our efforts to finally get the political process of the ground. The United Nations has made considerable efforts to achieve a composition of the constitutional committee that represents all components of Syrian society. Here once again, on behalf of France, I would like to pay tribute to Staffan de Mistura for his work.

Staffan has conducted in-depth consultations, adjusting his proposals several times so as to achieve a balanced, universally acceptable composition of the constitutional committee. The offer currently on the table meets those requirements. He was mandated to carry out this work and to achieve the establishment of the committee, and he has our full support for inviting the participants without delay to a first meeting in November. We strongly request that he move forward in this respect.

France has spared no effort to encourage progress in the political process. The ministers from the small group issued a joint communiqué on the margins of the General Assembly calling for the early creation of the constitutional committee. The members of the small group, whose representatives all spoke last week in the Security Council (see S/PV.8373), demonstrated their unity and support for that agenda along with the vast majority of members of the Council.

President Macron spoke on the telephone with President Trump at the beginning of the week on the subject of Syria, and the urgent need to make progress on the political track was underlined. Our determination to ensure that the constitutional committee is established is therefore very clear. The Istanbul summit, which will take place on Saturday and will bring together France, Germany, Russia and Turkey, must also allow for progress to be made on this specific point and, of course, on the subsequent political process. The small group will meet once again before the end of the month, and there is therefore unprecedented mobilization for the committee to meet. So let us come together to push ahead with all of our strength in this direction so that we do not allow this very fragile window of opportunity to close.

What do we need to do now? As confirmed by the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus, the top priority is for all actors to at last bring the necessary pressure to

bear on Damascus so that the committee can meet in November. That is the only possible path. Together we must show that we are firm and mobilized to ensure the implementation of the objectives that we have clearly endorsed.

The Council's convergence of views on a proposal initially made by Russia represents a unique opportunity; to fail to seize it would be irresponsible. We cannot allow the regime to ruin our collective efforts; if that happened, the conflict would continue for years, with no financial resources to rebuild the country and refugees left unable to return.

In summary, our friend Staffan de Mistura's road map is clear and in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which is more than ever our common compass, and he has our full support in implementing it. I will conclude with a solemn appeal to everyone's sense of responsibility: we must remain fully aware that the risk of a new escalation in the Syrian tragedy cannot be ruled out. The only definitive way to avoid that is with a credible and inclusive political solution. That means that the coming weeks are crucial, and that is why we will not hesitate to convene the Security Council as often as needed during the coming period to mobilize the international community in support of mediation on the part of the United Nations and to finally achieve the delayed establishment of the constitutional committee. I remind the Council that the establishment of that committee will be only the first step in the long process of bringing back peace to Syria, which includes elections and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment on the ground. We are counting on our friend Mr. De Mistura, just as he can count on our full support until the end of his mission.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and his team for briefing us today. I find it incredible that we should have to rehearse, for the benefit of the Syrian authorities, why the United Nations needs to be involved in Syria. It is not a matter of national sovereignty that there are over 1 million refugees. It is not a matter of national sovereignty that there are 400,000 dead in Syria. What we have there is a threat to international peace and security, and it is right that the United Nations is involved. The United Nations has been involved on the humanitarian aspect, the refugee aspect and the health aspect. It is absolutely front-and-centre correct that it should be involved in the political process. I will therefore go further than Mr. De Mistura, who talked about a serious challenge. I think that we actually face a grave challenge in the way that Members of the United Nations have been cooperating with the Organization, and as my American and French colleagues have said, we face a grave challenge in terms of the situation on the ground.

Additionally, there is now enormous doubt over what the Sochi agreement was and what it now represents. Either Russia has given the United Nations and the Council assurances that it has proven too weak to deliver on, or it was all a cynical smokescreen designed to divert attention and energy while Russia, Syria and Iran prosecuted the military campaign. That military campaign has been brought to a halt only by the international outrage at the threat to 2 to 3 million civilians in Idlib, before the Turks bravely stepped in and brokered an agreement that was designed to protect those civilians.

I therefore think that we need five things, in support of what my French and American colleagues have said. We need clarity on the status of the Sochi agreement and the new proposals of the Syrian authorities. What do they mean? What do Russia and Iran think about them? We need clarity on what steps need to be taken by all the players before 19 November, when Mr. De Mistura has offered to come back and brief the Council, and before the end of November when he steps down. We need clarity that Russia, as one of the five permanent members of the Council, an Astana guarantor and the convener of the Sochi agreement, will work constructively and tirelessly with the United Nations, along with Syria and Iran. All United Nations Members have a responsibility to support Mr. De Mistura as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. We need to hear today that that promise of constructive, tireless and dedicated engagement is there to bring this conflict to an end.

We need the agreement on Idlib to hold. We need for that opportunity that others have mentioned to be seized. We need the constitutional committee to be convened, and I share the views of my American and French colleagues on that. We need humanitarian access to be improved, and we need resolution 2254 (2015) to be upheld. The Council needs to come together to support the political process. Without the political process, this dreadful conflict will never truly end, whatever happens militarily on the ground. We look forward to further reports following the international meetings in the coming days, but I believe that we must hear today from all Council members that they will

support the United Nations as it tries its very best to move the political process forward.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria for his briefing this morning. We commend Mr. Staffan de Mistura's intensified efforts to reach a political solution and bring an end to the conflict in Syria. We very much appreciate his update today following his visit to Damascus, although I have to say that the content of what he has reported on, the response from Damascus, is not what we had hoped for. We are deeply disappointed by the continued lack of cooperation on the part of the Syrian Government regarding the constitutional committee, which contradicts the Sochi final statement that was circulated by Russia to the Council. We support Mr. De Mistura's approach and his insistence on credibility, balance and international legitimacy. We therefore call again on the Syrian Government to fully cooperate with the United Nations, and on those with close relations with Damascus, especially Russia, to support such efforts.

We fully support Mr. De Mistura and his mandate to establish the constitutional committee, which constitutes the first step towards a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The Sochi final statement made clear that it was via the Geneva process and the facilitation of the Special Envoy that the final selection of the committee would be made. Therefore, the Special Envoy's intensified efforts in many ways constitute a make-or-break moment for the United Nations efforts to convene a credible constitutional committee and for the legitimacy that comes with that. Mr. De Mistura therefore needs and deserves the wholehearted backing of the Council, because it is only through a United Nations-led process that we can achieve a political solution that is acceptable to all Syrians and the international community. At this critical time, we want to reiterate our strong call on the Syrian Government, which I believe everyone in the Council agrees on, to fully engage and support the United Nations-led political process and make sure that there will be real progress in time for the next meeting in November, as previous speakers have said.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and express our appreciation for his efforts to facilitate a political settlement of the Syrian issue.

Thanks to the efforts of the Syrian people themselves and with the support of the international community, the situation in Syria remains generally stable and the process for a political settlement has maintained its momentum. The Syrian Government invited Special Envoy De Mistura to visit Damascus for an in-depth exchange of views on facilitating the political process in Syria, including the formation of the constitutional committee. The Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran met in Moscow and jointly sent out a positive message in support of the facilitation of the political process in Syria. We appreciate the efforts of all of the parties in that regard. China has always supported a political solution to the Syrian issue. The international community should push for the revitalization of the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, in which Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be respected.

The Syrian conflict has been ongoing for more than seven years. Resolving differences requires all parties to work together and meet one another halfway. The formation of a constitutional committee must be conducted in a consistent and orderly manner, while striking a balance between the legitimate concerns of the Syrian Government and those of the other parties to make sure that the committee is representative of and acceptable to all in order to ensure that the Syrian political process is sustainable and constructive. The future of Syria will ultimately be determined by the Syrian people themselves. The international community should continue its support for the good offices of the United Nations and Special Envoy De Mistura, properly leverage the role of the Astana process and help to ensure that the Syrian parties remain fully engaged in dialogue and consultations, thereby facilitating the efforts of the Syrian parties to gradually achieve reconciliation, resolve differences and find a realistic and lasting political solution. We hope that all the parties concerned will jointly ensure the effective functioning of the Idlib demilitarized zone, consolidate the gains made in the fight against terrorism, assist in the clearance of explosive remnants of war, rebuild infrastructure and ensure the return of refugees and internally displaced persons as soon as possible.

China stands ready to work with the international community in a joint effort to facilitate a political settlement in Syria, improve the humanitarian situation and play a constructive role in restoring peace and stability in Syria and the region.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. Frankly speaking, we are disappointed. We were hoping for more positive information, and we are concerned about the challenges that Mr. De Mistura described, especially the attitude of the Syrian regime with regard to the role of the United Nations.

In our view, it is time for the constitutional committee to be launched. We believe that it is important to make irreversible progress towards a political resolution of the conflict in Syria by convening the constitutional committee under United Nations auspices as soon as possible, in November, before the end of Special Envoy De Mistura's tenure. We need to see the actual launch of the constitutional committee, and invitations should be sent out in the coming weeks.

One can speak of a credible political process only if the constitutional committee itself is credible, balanced and inclusive and represents all Syrians. Therefore, the role of the United Nations is key, and the Security Council adopted resolution 2254 (2015) to that end. The role and the autonomy of the United Nations are essential, and that autonomous role includes the membership of the committee and the scheduling and scope of its work. The United Nations did not start from scratch but is operating fully in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi final statement of January, circulated to the Council by the Russian Federation. The Syrian regime therefore has to work with the United Nations, and we count on the countries that have influence, especially the Russian Federation, to use such influence with Damascus.

We need to see the meaningful commitment of the Syrian regime to work with the United Nations. The political time and space for further delaying the process and endlessly moving the goalposts have simply run out. We expect the Syrian regime to make sure that the Syrian delegation can travel to participate, that it can participate in full and that it will participate in good faith — contrary to what we saw during the earlier Geneva rounds. We expect the same of any members of the United Nations middle list who currently reside in Syria. Let me also say that we strongly support the Special Envoy's commitment to ensuring that women constitute 30 per cent of the constitutional committee's members, as he indicated earlier. We strongly urge that such a commitment be extended to ensuring that any future drafting subcommittee or other committee also include 30 per cent women's representation, particularly this week given yesterday's open debate dedicated to resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security (see S/PV.8382).

Of course, the constitutional committee is not a goal in and of itself. It is part of the broader United Nations-led political process based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and on resolution 2254 (2015). Implementation of that resolution is the only path forward. There is no circumventing that important resolution. Let us use the "Idlib window", as Staffan de Mistura mentioned earlier.

In conclusion, let me just refer to our well-known position on accountability, humanitarian assistance and certainly the need for a political transition to take place as a precondition for reconstruction aid.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the holding of this meeting and to Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his important briefing.

Peru notes with concern the prospects for a political solution in Syria following the recent meetings held by the Special Envoy with key stakeholders, about which he has informed us this morning. Only a few days ago, in the Security Council (see S/PV.8373), we believed that the auspicious agreement reached between Turkey and the Russian Federation to establish a demilitarized zone in Idlib created an environment more conducive to achieving a political agreement, making it possible to envisage a lasting peace in Syria. Today we would like to reaffirm the urgent need to establish an inclusive and representative constitutional committee pursuant to what was agreed at the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi nine months ago. We believe that that important initiative, like the Astana process, is required to complement the Geneva process. In that regard, with full respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, we deem it important and urgent to form the constitutional committee mentioned above and to define its operational and decision-making mechanisms, with a view to advancing the political process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We are particularly concerned about the possibility that further delays in establishing the committee could affect the credibility of the process and lead to greater divisions.

We emphasize the importance that all parties engage constructively in the negotiations, while showing flexibility, concern for the country's future

and national unity so as to build the necessary trust to promote reconciliation and build sustainable peace in Syria. Accordingly, we wish to express our full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in his efforts to move forward in that direction, in particular the way in which he approached the discussions in Damascus and the work that he told us he would be doing over the next several days.

In conclusion, we also would like to underline how important it is that the Astana guarantors and other countries with influence on the parties help to ensure that the constitutional committee be convened promptly, ideally in November.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing on the results of his visit to Damascus. We appreciate his visit and thank him for all his efforts to achieve peace in Syria. We highly value his engagement in intensive further consultations in the period ahead so as to ascertain the possibilities for convening a credible and balanced United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led constitutional committee.

Kazakhstan is closely following the situation presented by the crisis in Syria and supports all initiatives aimed at resolving the violent conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as possible. We consider the protection of Syrian civilians and infrastructure to be a high priority. At this moment, our attention should be focused on preserving the peace in Idlib. In that regard, I would like to thank Russia and Turkey for the agreement, which has allowed us to prevent bloodshed and a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe. We are encouraged by the information concerning the establishment of humanitarian corridors that can be used by as many as 3,000 civilians. All of that is the result of the creation of a demilitarized zone, which has become a guarantee for the cessation of hostilities.

We welcome the agreement reached on 24 October in Moscow by the Astana guarantors to speed up the formation of the constitutional committee. At the same time, Astana calls on all interested parties to take into account the interests of all Syrians in the formation of the constitutional committee in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We also commend the readiness of the Astana group to pursue dialogue with the so-called small group on Syria. We know that the dialogue should be based on that resolution.

Kazakhstan underlines the need to move towards the creation of the constitutional committee as a starting point for the revitalization of the political settlement process in Syria. We hope that the committee will be formed as soon as possible. At the same time, in the future the constitutional committee should work in compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the United Nations resolutions on the Syrian issue to protect the sovereignty, independence and unification of Syria.

Astana underlines the importance of achieving a political solution in Syria, especially by forming a constitutional committee as a major step in the political settlement of the crisis. Astana fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the regional crisis. It is the Syrians themselves who should begin to shape the future political system of the Syrian State, with the necessary legislative reforms, territorial and administrative structure and presidential and parliamentary elections. Only a political, diplomatic approach in the spirit of the Charter and the Council documents on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace can bring proper results.

There is therefore a strong need to continue to support the goals of the Astana talks and further Geneva negotiations in order to see positive outcomes. We believe that the Syrian people are capable of determining their own future. However, achieving their aspirations for democracy, reconstruction and stability is impossible without genuine international support.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Security Council has a particular responsibility to end the tragic period in Syria. We urge the Council to unite around that common political goal by supporting the Geneva and Astana processes, as well as the Special Envoy and a comprehensive political settlement.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his important briefing. The State of Kuwait expresses its appreciation and gratitude for all his efforts over the past four years in carrying out his difficult task. We are certain that he will make further efforts until his last day in office.

We have just listened to the outcomes of the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus, which we had hoped would lead to positive results and would advance the Syrian political process nine months after the declaration made in Sochi regarding the constitutional committee.

Unfortunately, the outcomes of the visit did not meet our aspirations and expectations.

According to resolution 2254 (2015), the formation of the constitutional committee is an important step in the political process and a basis for further steps in the future, including the drafting of the constitution and the holding of free and credible elections in Syria under the supervision of the United Nations and with the participation of all Syrians.

The Sochi declaration is clear in terms of identifying the role of the Special Envoy and the Geneva process in the final formation of the constitutional committee so as to contribute to the political settlement under the auspices of the United Nations and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

There is still nearly one month to go until Mr. De Mistura leaves office. We encourage him to continue his efforts to form the constitutional committee and to ensure that its work can begin as soon as possible. We once again express our support to him. We believe that he has the necessary mandate to establish the constitutional committee, and we agree with him on the need to create a balanced and credible committee.

In conclusion, we stress the need to respect and to implement Security Council resolutions. They should not be a dead letter, especially resolution 2254 (2015), which was unanimously adopted by the Council nearly three years ago. In the coming days we have an opportunity that we must all seize, particularly after the stability seen in Idlib following the Russian-Turkish agreement. That provides an important opportunity to revitalize the political process led by the United Nations following some eight years of war, destruction, killing and displacement in Syria. We hope that diplomatic, not military, solutions will prevail.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing today. We highly appreciate and support his continued and tireless efforts to facilitate a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.

While he informed us in his most recent briefing (S/PV.8373) of his plan to move on after November, we have full confidence that he will do everything possible until the last day to help to move the political process forward. In that context, we welcome his meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic in Damascus a few days ago.

We note that the Special Envoy had, to use his own words, "a very frank and very intense exchange of views" on the constitutional committee and the political process in general. We thank him for sharing with us what transpired during the meeting. We understand that the discussion on that issue has not been easy and that finding common ground will continue to be a challenge.

Nevertheless, we believe that Special Envoy De Mistura should continue his efforts to convene the constitutional committee as soon as he possibly can. We all agree that the agreement reached between Russia and Turkey on Idlib provides a window of opportunity that should be seized in order to revive a credible, inclusive and Syrian-owned political process, starting with the establishment of a United Nations-facilitated constitutional committee.

We note that there was a meeting of the Astana guarantors in Moscow this week, which we hope will be helpful in sustaining the engagement to move the political process forward, particularly the formation of the constitutional committee. At the same time, we also look forward to the four-way summit on Syria to be held in Istanbul this weekend. We hope that all those diplomatic initiatives at the various levels will contribute to reinvigorating the United Nations-facilitated political process. As the process of the constitutional committee should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, we encourage all Syrian parties to constructively engage with the Special Envoy.

Finally, this is the time to further coordinate and accelerate diplomatic efforts to support the Special Envoy in his endeavours to establish the constitutional committee. The Council should also continue to put its full weight behind the Special Envoy, whose efforts will be extremely critical over the coming days and months.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the holding of this briefing on the establishment of the constitutional committee in the Syrian Arab Republic and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his informative briefing.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the meeting on 24 October between the Special Envoy and the Syrian Foreign Minister, leading to a communiqué from the Office of the Special Envoy, which reported a very frank

and very intense exchange of views concerning the constitutional committee and the political process in general. In that regard, my country calls on the Syrian parties to choose the path of dialogue by resolutely joining the Geneva and Sochi processes with a view to effectively overcoming the remaining obstacles to the establishment of the constitutional committee.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the holding of the upcoming four-party summit among Germany, France, Russia and Turkey in Istanbul on 27 October, which will serve as a framework for reflection on a political solution to the crisis, under the auspices of the United Nations, and on the situation in Idlib in north-western Syria.

Côte d'Ivoire sincerely hopes that the dialogue among all the stakeholders will continue with a view to ensuring a peaceful end to the crisis in Syria — the key to lasting peace and stability — irrespective of the conclusions of the talks between Mr. Staffan de Mistura and the Syrian authorities, on the one hand, and the four-party summit planned in Istanbul, on the other.

We therefore call on the parties to the conflict to respect the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), which sets out the road map of the political process in Syria. We once again urge Council members to restore the unity that has always enabled them, in difficult circumstances, to overcome the challenges to international peace and security.

As Mr. Staffan de Mistura prepares to step down, Côte d'Ivoire would like to reiterate its deep gratitude to him for his sustained commitment and for his work to restore lasting peace in Syria.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland) At the outset, let me join other delegations in expressing my deep appreciation for the Special Envoy's tireless efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria. I would also like to assure him of Poland's strong support for his ongoing work and for the United Nations-led political peace process in Syria.

As there can be no military solution to the conflict that can bring sustainable peace to Syria, we should aim at reaching an intra-Syrian framework political agreement. Furthermore, we strongly believe that the Idlib ceasefire agreement could be an opportunity for a resumption of the political process under United Nations auspices in Geneva as soon as possible. In that regard, we fully support Mr. De Mistura's efforts to establish a constitutional committee as soon as possible. As we spent a great deal of time last week discussing women and peace and security here in the Chamber (see S/PV.8382), it is worth recalling Mr. De Mistura's appeal for ensuring women's participation in the constitutional committee, since there is a very clear link between women's participation in the peace process and the durability and quality of peace agreements.

Setting up the constitutional committee should now be a priority, to be swiftly followed by further steps to enable a negotiated political transition process, which requires the full and constructive engagement of all the parties to the conflict. There is a special role in this for the Syrian authorities, which should participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions. This is for the Syrians themselves to negotiate. Only a real, tangible political process ensuring that the Syrian people are genuinely represented, can lead to the establishment of a timetable and procedures for drafting a constitution and conducting free and fair United Nations-supervised elections.

In conclusion, I want to underline that any political solution must be brokered in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank the delegations of France, the United Kingdom and the United States for requesting the convening of this meeting and Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his informative briefing and hard work in facilitating the political process in Syria. The promptness with which this meeting has been convened, so soon after the Council's meeting on 17 October (S/PV.8373) and the 24 October meeting in Damascus, underscores the need for greater efforts to address and resolve our new challenges and to set up a constitutional committee without further delay, with a view to opening the way to a peaceful political solution to this long-running conflict.

While the Republic of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the Special Envoy's exemplary conduct and the way he has carried out his functions in extremely complex circumstances, we can only deplore the fact that today, after eight years of conflict, during which numerous meetings have been held in the Geneva and Astana formats, we find ourselves at a crossroads, as the representative of France eloquently pointed out at the 17 October meeting and mentioned again this morning.

The spectre of military escalation and the difficult path towards a resumption of peace negotiations between the Syrian parties continue to be a focus of the international community's attention.

We welcomed the meeting in Damascus on 24 October between the Special Envoy and Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs as part of the efforts to set in motion the constitutional committee to be charged with drafting a new constitution for Syria. We want to remind the parties that significant progress still has to be made, nine months after an agreement was reached in Sochi on forming the committee. In that regard, the demilitarization of Idlib favoured by the Astana guarantors offers an opportunity to give the political process greater impetus by creating an environment conducive to intra-Syrian peace negotiations.

It is important to use this relatively peaceful environment to deal with the difficulties that have been preventing the committee from starting work without delay. As has been emphasized, the main stumbling block remains the composition of the middle third list, of members of civil society proposed by the United Nations. We appeal to the parties to spare no effort to establish a committee with extremely high credibility, which is crucial, and one that is as representative as possible. In addition, for the committee to be credible and legitimate, its composition, rules of operation and decision-making must be based on transparent mechanisms. National parties must also renounce their partisan interests and assume a position of equality of all so as to ensure the success of the constitutional committee's work. As Special Envoy de Mistura has stressed on previous occasions and again today, a credible and balanced committee could be the cornerstone of an inclusive political process for Syrians towards implementing resolution 2254 (2015).

It is on this basis that the Government of Equatorial Guinea hopes that tomorrow's Syria summit between the Russian Federation, Turkey, France and Germany will significantly help to promote a political solution to the crisis by giving priority to the debate on the start of the committee's work. Additional steps to strengthen security and stability, as well as conditions for the return of refugees and the restoration of social and economic infrastructure, also need to be addressed.

Article 24 of Chapter V of the Charter of the United Nations confers on the Security Council the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. I therefore call on the Council to bring peace and security back to Syria. After eight years of conflict, the situation in Syria must no longer be a subject that crystallizes the division among the members of the Security Council. A sustainable solution cannot be achieved in Syria without the unhindered involvement of the members of the Council, whether they are allies of the belligerents or have the capacity to influence the national parties. The peoples of the world are watching us, and history will judge us. As members of the Security Council, permanent or non-permanent, let us demonstrate the humanist values that characterize our Organization and bring an end to this conflict by putting the well-being and legitimate prosperity of Syrians ahead of geostrategic interests.

We call on the Government and the people of Syria to take into account their country's current political situation, support the efforts of the international community and undertake an inclusive debate among the various parties to the conflict within the framework of a constitutional committee and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), which was unanimously adopted by this Security Council at the proposal of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to the Security Council today. We heard a briefing from Mr. De Mistura in this Chamber (see S/PV.8373) just 10 days ago. It is hard to recall any other instances of public briefings of the Council by United Nations mediators on every contact with the parties to a given conflict or the international stakeholders involved. Experience has shown that this kind of work requires great patience, caution and a very measured dose of publicity so as not to harm the matter at hand. We are therefore not convinced that those who insisted on convening today's open meeting are genuine fans of a peaceful settlement in Syria. It is not hard to postulate that what we are seeing is rather the latest show of tragic breast-beating and moralizing directed at Russia.

There is noticeable action being taken at the moment with regard to Syria. On one hand, the United Nations is working within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). The Idlib agreements are being implemented and our Turkish partners are working diligently on that. The guarantors of the Astana process are making serious efforts to halt the violence on the ground and create conditions that can advance the intra-Syrian dialogue. It is difficult, but concrete progress is clearly being

made. People in many parts of Syria are beginning to return to normal life and feel that they are safer.

On the other hand, we have a group of self-styled examiners sitting on high who have done no visible service in the cause of a settlement but who for some reason have arrogated to themselves the right to a biased investigation of what Russia is doing. We want to emphasize that there are no grounds for establishing artificial deadlines for creating a constitutional committee based on the outcomes of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. It cannot be imposed under conditions that run counter to the wishes of the Syrians themselves. Mr. De Mistura's visit to Damascus at the invitation of the Syrian Government was useful as part of the pathway to achieving the goals outlined in Sochi. We are confident that for the remainder of his term he will spare no effort to advance the issue within his mandate as mediator in full respect for Syria's sovereignty, and we will help him do that.

The very fact of the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus is crucial, but it is not the only development on the Syrian settlement. The Astana troika recently held consultations in Moscow, and representatives of Turkey, Russia, Germany and France are meeting in Istanbul tomorrow for a quadrilateral summit in which the Special Envoy will also participate. Incidentally, according to our information and assessment, his visit to Damascus was very useful and constructive. We should not underestimate its importance and the momentum that his visit can give the settlement process.

However, we caution those who would like to reap dubious dividends from an artificially whipped-up crisis that it would do criminal damage to the political process. That applies first and foremost to the Western participants in the so-called small group. We believe that the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy understand the full depths of their responsibility in this delicate matter. We assume that Mr. De Mistura's briefing today is not his political farewell. He can still get a great deal done before his mandate ends, and we are sure that he will work tirelessly to get results. I will say it again — we will help him in every possible way.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

My delegation thanks the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing. We want to highlight his visit to Damascus, as well as his efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict. We believe that dialogue is the best way to achieve positive results. In that regard, we again underscore the efforts of the Astana guarantors and the agreements concluded on the situation in Idlib, which have had tangible effects in reducing violence and restoring relative calm for the Syrian people. We reiterate that the conflict can have no military solution, and we therefore reject any attempts to foment fragmentation or sectarianism in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the presence of foreign forces with no authorization from the Syrian Government.

I want to once again emphasize Mr. De Mistura's tireless efforts on this very delicate and important issue, not just for the Council but for the entire international community. I would therefore like to thank him for his work and reiterate our full support for his efforts to find a political solution. We eagerly await the outcome of the upcoming high-level meetings. After hearing his briefing today, our delegation sees the glass as half full rather than half empty. We remain optimistic that patience and dedication will have positive results. We agree that if we want to strengthen the political process, we must also give the Special Envoy the opportunity to work and focus on reaching that outcome. We believe that the solution requires ensuring the continuity and implementation of the Sochi final outcome, whose main goal is establishing a credible, balanced and representative constitutional committee through continued consultation and cooperation with the Syrian Government. We urge that the conflict be resolved through dialogue and an inclusive and united political process, led by and for the Syrian people, that can lead to a peaceful and sustainable solution within the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), under the auspices of the United Nations, in line with international law and with full respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I want to note that I have the impression, as other colleagues certainly also do, that those who called for this meeting today are attempting to nullify the cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations. As

the Council knows, that cooperation has had a number of positive results over the many years of the so-called Syrian crisis. I have heard some colleagues, specifically those who called for today's meeting, saying that the Syrian Government does not want to cooperate with the United Nations. The Council is aware that those words have nothing to do with the reality.

First of all, we are a founding Member of the United Nations and have been elected as a member of the Security Council three times. We are therefore quite familiar with the importance both of this international Organization and the Council.

Secondly, we have been committed to the Geneva talks since the beginning. We held dozens of meetings with the late Kofi Annan and with Lakhdar Brahimi and Staffan de Mistura. We have devoted thousands of hours to working with them to help Syria end the crisis, and we are therefore committed to the United Nations. The Council knows that we have sat down with it 56 times to discuss reports issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which is a humanitarian body of the United Nations. I repeat, I have discussed OCHA reports with the Council 56 times, which represents additional proof of our cooperation with the United Nations. We cooperate with all the United Nations entities located in Damascus, as well as 28 international non-governmental organizations. Of course, we participated in the Astana process, which, as the Council is aware, has yielded many positive results. We are cooperating with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, as the Council is also aware, and we have participated with the Council in dozens of meetings on that topic. There is therefore no reason to doubt my Government's cooperation with the United Nations, and I hope that this topic will be pulled out of circulation in such important meetings.

This meeting, which is being held to hear a briefing by the Special Envoy, is taking place two days after the anniversary of the founding of our Organization. We are proud that my country has been a founding Member and signatory to the Charter, as I mentioned earlier. The Charter has enshrined the principles of respecting the sovereignty and independence of States Members of the United Nations; rejecting the crimes of aggression against them; rejecting interference in their internal affairs; and rejecting actions that undermine their territorial integrity.

It is shameful that 74 years after the creation of our Organization and the adoption of those lofty principles, these values are being swept aside and ignored by States, including some permanent members of the Council. Certain Western countries violated the Charter very quickly, even before the ink it was written in had dried.

Those States in particular conspired against my country and waged an unprecedented seven-year terrorist war against it. They have created military bases to sponsor and protect the terrorists whom they brought from the four corners of the globe; they called them the moderate armed opposition. The plans and projects of the enemies of Syria are harmful and poisonous as snake venom, but in the face of the resilience and determination of our people, they will become as fragile as a spider's web.

I deplore the fact that the statement made today by the Special Envoy did not refer in any way to terrorism or to the shelling carried out by the so-called international coalition, which is led by the United States of America. Syrian towns and villages have suffered 69 military raids carried out by coalition planes that have created thousands of martyrs and wounded thousands more, in addition to destroying my country's infrastructure. The Special Envoy did not mention that, although I always started my meetings with him in Geneva by recalling the need for him to make a statement condemning these military operations against Syrian civilians, in Deir ez-Zor and elsewhere.

Once again, on 19 October, the illegitimate so-called international coalition led by the United States of America committed a heinous crime that caused dozens of civilian deaths. Coalition planes deliberately targeted the villages of Sousa and Bubadran in the south-eastern part of Deir ez-Zor province, martyring 62 civilians, mostly women and children, and leaving many people injured, some of them critically.

I have sent the Council 96 official messages informing it of the appalling crimes committed by the illegitimate coalition against Syrian civilians. I demonstrated that the coalition had targeted everything except armed terrorist groups. As a poet once said, if my interlocutors had been alive, my voice would have reached them.

Certain members of the Council have been passive with regard to those crimes. The Special Envoy has joined them in also ignoring those crimes and not mentioning them in the reports of the Secretariat, which

are claimed to be credible although they are far from being so. We therefore call for accountability and for those States that consider themselves to be defenders of the right to life to move away today, not tomorrow, from this pernicious coalition.

What is astonishing is that those States that falsely wept over Idlib and made threats, claiming that they wanted to protect civilians in that city, turned a blind eye when armed terrorist groups in Idlib randomly targeted civilians in Aleppo city with dozens of missiles on 24 October, resulting in scores of martyrs and wounded people.

We have heard no statement on the attack on Aleppo from the Special Envoy, the Secretary-General or anyone else on the Council. Idlib is, of course, a dear part of my country, and we are determined to recover it. We now allow political and diplomatic efforts to be made, but our right under the Charter and international law allows us to fully recover Idlib when we deem it necessary.

The Syrian Government will not allow Idlib to become another Tora Bora. We will not allow that. There can be no other Tora Bora terrorist groups in Idlib. That has already been fully decided upon.

Based on our respect for the role of the United Nations in facilitating intra-Syrian dialogue, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs for Syria and the Diaspora met the Special Envoy in Damascus on 24 October. During that meeting, a discussion was held on the efforts made to move ahead with the political process to resolve the crisis in Syria, as well as ideas regarding the political process and the constitutional committee. Those issues were discussed by our Minister and Secretary-General António Guterres in New York on the margins of the work of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session.

My country believes in the role of the United Nations and its Charter, as did the founding fathers. Its role is based on the strength of law and not the arrogance of force, a role that respects States' sovereignty and non-interference in their internal affairs.

A State that is a permanent member of the Council has established a camp for terrorists in Al-Tanf in which it deploys its military troops. As the Council is aware, Al-Tanf is a part of the Syrian territories, so that would be a violation of the Charter. However, the Syrian Government has committed positively and openly to the Geneva negotiations and transparently dealt with the Special Envoy since he took up his mandate as intra-Syrian facilitator four years ago. My country continues to wish for the success of his mission because it is in the interest of the Syrian people, as attested to by the Syrian Government when it dealt with his two predecessors, the late Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi.

My country has engaged with the Astana process in a fully positive way and dealt positively with the results of the national Syrian dialogue in Sochi. We continue to maintain the results achieved regarding the creation of a committee to discuss the current Constitution.

The Special Envoy can facilitate the work of the committee. My country's Government was the first to submit a list of participants to the Special Envoy on behalf of the Syrian State, and we believe that the guarantor States can play an important role, in full cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government, in the creation of the committee and its mandate and working mechanism, with the facilitation of the United Nations. The Council should note that we are not excluding the United Nations. However, its role is to facilitate an intra-Syrian dialogue, and it does not have guardianship over the dialogue. The task of the Special Envoy is to facilitate intra-Syrian dialogue.

No one wants to end the crisis that has been ravaging my country for more than seven years more than the Syrian Government. We have been bearing the brunt of a terrorist war whose goal was to fragment the Syrian State, kill our people and destroy our infrastructure. The plan was to turn Syria into a failed State, but we have made that plan fail. We have also been open to counter-terrorism initiatives and to resolving the crisis and settling the cases of the people who have become involved in the war. The aim is to achieve national reconciliation with a view to ending the bloodbath and preserving the unity of Syria and its people.

We believe that establishing a committee to discuss a constitution that reflects Syrian society and realizes its ambitions is a way to end the crisis. In our view, therefore, the meeting between our Foreign Minister and the Secretary-General on the margins of the general debate of the General Assembly, as well as the recent consultations with the Special Envoy in Damascus, represents the start of efforts reflecting our positive cooperation with the Special Envoy. We also believe that coordination with the two Astana guarantors, Iran

and Russia, in reaching thoughtful solutions that will ensure the establishment of a constitutional committee and help to realize the aspirations of the Syrian people, will play an important role in achieving our objective. It was the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi that proposed establishing a constitutional committee, not the Special Envoy, the Geneva talks or the Astana process. Syrians themselves took the decision in Sochi to establish a committee in order to discuss their Constitution. We also believe that setting artificial deadlines and proposing ideas that are not conducive to the outcome we desire will not have positive results in helping us achieve our aspirations.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that the Syrian Government will make every effort to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people and of our true friends, as well as all who aspire to build a world free of terrorism, strengthen the values of the Charter of the United Nations and achieve stability and security in the region and across the world. We are ready to continue cooperating with the United Nations to reach the outcome we desire.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I will be very brief. We have heard a great deal of support for the Special Envoy in the Chamber. Let us look to that to hold between now and 19 November. I have a question about Idlib. The Syrian Ambassador referred to the Syrian authorities retaking — I repeat, retaking — Idlib. That would cut across the agreement that the Russians and the Turks have made with regard to Idlib. I would like to know if the Russian and Turkish agreement on Idlib still holds and how long it is likely to hold.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank my colleague the Ambassador of Britain for her question on that issue and for requesting further clarification.

First, the Council knows of course that I have frequently said on behalf of my Government that Idlib is a beloved part of Syria. We are not talking about Florida, Glasgow or Marseilles. We are talking about Idlib, an area that is part of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Secondly, when terrorism threatens a member State of the Council, it is natural for its Government to step in immediately to combat it. There are thousands of such examples. Yesterday, every TV channel in America was reporting on the terrorist act in which nine parcels containing bombs were mailed to prominent people and public institutions in New York and talking about the gravity of that terrorist act. Fortunately, it did not result in any loss of life. We all think that the United States Administration is doing the right action in investigating the matter because it is an act of terrorism. And what about the 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters in Idlib? Of course they are all moderates — and they belong to the Al-Nusra Front, Da'esh, Alwiya Al-Furqan and Turkmen and other groups. They are all moderate by nature, those 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters who shelled Aleppo two days ago, killing scores and injuring dozens. They shelled Aleppo from Idlib, which constitutes a breach of the Russian-Turkish agreement. That has nothing to do with our intention of retaking Idlib, which is a beloved part of our country that is currently under terrorist control.

Thirdly, we will retake Idlib and restore our sovereignty over Idlib when the Government deems it appropriate to do so. What does that mean? It means that we will do it when we are sure that diplomatic and political efforts have failed to restore that beloved part of our territory to national sovereignty. That issue is governed by diplomatic and political protocols. We know how to address it and naturally we have friends and allies to help us analyse the situation. It is therefore no surprise if I say on behalf of my Government that we will restore our sovereignty over Idlib when we see fit to do so, because it is part of our lands.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I will be just as brief as my British colleague. She asked a very specific question about whether or not the recent Russian-Turkish Idlib agreement is in effect. Yes, it is still being implemented, as we said in our statement. At the same time, I would like to confirm what the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic said, which is that we are talking about an area that is part of sovereign Syria. It goes without saying that we believe that, ultimately, the legitimate Syrian authorities will retake control over all of the territory

that makes up the Syrian Arab Republic. There are no contradictions between those two points.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura to respond to comments and questions.

Mr. De Mistura: Let me first clarify one point. When I had the very intense and long meeting with Minister Al-Moualem, he did not raise the issue of terrorism. That is why I did not specifically refer to that in today's meeting about my visit to Damascus. The only issue was the constitutional committee.

Let me remind the Council that November is a very special month, not because of my departure, but because there are a lot of opportunities for some progress with regard to the constitutional committee. First, the Istanbul summit is scheduled for tomorrow, 27 October. Secondly, there will certainly be a meeting of the Astana group, and we are looking forward to seeing whether the Astana group will be able to draft some type of proposal that the United Nations can hopefully approve and decide whether it is credible and inclusive. Thirdly, there will probably be more than one meeting of the small group, with one taking place on Monday 29 October. We also heard of a possible summit between President Putin and President Trump in November, and we are scheduled to brief the Security Council at least once more on 19 November.

So during this period, I have been asked to monitor especially the Astana group, because they have a task that was given to them for the month of November. I will continue to ascertain the feasibility of the follow-up to the Sochi declaration and that of the constitutional committee in order to report accordingly to the Security Council and to the Secretary-General.

I will leave no stone unturned until the last day of my assignment in order to be able to take advantage of any opportunity to issue invitations to a first meeting of the constitutional committee and to assess the outcome of all those discussions and meetings, including by briefing the Secretary-General and the Security Council about the clarity of the constitutional committee and why things are moving or why they are not moving. The Council deserves to have all of that in November, and I have the duty to clarify that.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.